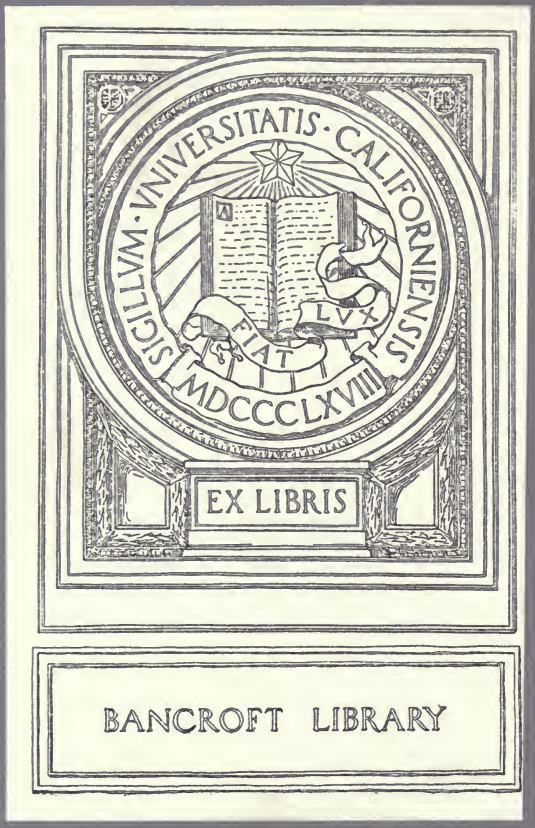
E
99
.M2M25


SIGILLVM · VNIVERSITATIS · CALIFORNIENSIS
FIAT LVX
MDCCCLXVIII
EX LIBRIS
BANCROFT LIBRARY

072

With the Compliments of the A

REPRINTED FROM THE AMERICAN ANTIQUARIAN, SEPTEMBER, 1888.

TWO MANDAN CHIEFS.

—BY—

WASHINGTON MATTHEWS. 1843-1905.

The Bancroft Library

No. 7072

Bancroft Library

FOUR BEARS, 1832.

RUSHING EAGLE, 1872.

Bancroft Libr

TWO MANDAN CHIEFS.

17542-B
Bancroft Library

BY WASHINGTON MATTHEWS.

IT was in 1832 that George Catlin ascended the Missouri and made his first acquaintance with wild Indians. He traveled on the first steamer that went as far up the stream as the Mandan villages. Of all the tribes which he visited on that journey, the Mandans seemed to interest him the most. This was, no doubt, partly due to the fact that the Mandans were a more interesting people than some of their neighbors; but it was largely owing to certain favoring circumstances connected with his sojourn among them. Their greatest annual ceremony occurred during his visit and he found in the person of Mr. Joseph Kipp, the factor of the American Fur Company at Fort Clarke—the Mandan trading-post—an unusually intelligent and obliging interpreter. Perhaps, too, during his long and pleasant visit at Fort Clarke, where he was the guest of Mr. Kipp, he imbibed something of the partiality for the Mandans which the latter individual naturally felt. I have often observed on the frontier that white men, who have lived long with any particular tribe of Indians, acquire a great sense of loyalty to such tribe, that they hate its enemies, love its friends, sound its praises and maintain its superiority to all other tribes. Had Catlin had opportunities for witnessing the great ceremonies of other tribes, under the conduct of guides as intelligent as Mr. Kipp, he would perhaps not have considered the Mandans so superior to their neighbors as he represents them in his writings.

So highly did he esteem them, that he thought it proper to seek a European origin for them. But the search for specific old-world origins for the people of the new world was one of the ruling manias of Catlin's day. No one seemed capable of writing about the Indians then without advancing some pet origin theory. It was a day of easy scientific speculation, and the arguments of Catlin were as free and untrammeled as those of any of his cotemporaries. His theory that the Mandans were descended from Welshmen who "sailed in ten ships, under the direction of Prince Madoc, from North Wales, in the early part of the fourteenth century," has little value in the light shed by modern discovery.

99
M2 M25

Five years after Catlin's visit to the Upper Missouri valley the smallpox was introduced into that region, and the Mandans, owing to the nature of their villages, suffered more severely than their nomadic neighbors. Catlin believed they were exterminated; he had heard exaggerated reports to this effect and credited them. A sufficient number, however, of the tribe was left to maintain its organization, its language and its elaborate religious ceremonials. In his last work, entitled "Okeepa," published in 1867, appears a letter from Kenneth McKenzie, written at the Mandan village in 1839, from which we quote the following. "Of the Mandans, between forty and fifty were all that were left when the disease subsided. The Riccarrees soon after moved up and took possession of their village, making slaves of the remaining Mandans, and are living in it at the present time. A few months after the Riccarrees took possession they were attacked by a war party of Sioux, and in the middle of the battle, the Mandans, men, women and children, whilst fighting for the Riccarrees, at a concerted signal ran through the pickets and threw themselves under the horses' feet of the Sioux, and, still fighting, begged the Sioux to kill them 'that they might not live to be the dogs of the Riccarrees.' The last of the tribe were here slain." (P. 50). Notwithstanding this melancholy tale we find by consulting the "Report of the Commissioner of Indian Affairs" for 1885, that 410 Mandans then survived, 340 of whom drew rations from the government in that year. He who doubts that they are the same race as that which Catlin saw need only collect a small vocabulary of their present language and compare it with the vocabulary of Catlin, collected in 1832, or that of the Prince of Wied, obtained in 1833, to remove his doubts. As late as 1870 I witnessed a portion of the ceremony of the Okeepa and saw enough of it to convince me of the faithfulness of Catlin's description of this awful rite, written in 1832.

My first acquaintance with the Mandans was made in 1865. At that time all recollection of Catlin's visit was lost, both by the Indians and the whites who lived among them. White men who had traded for years among the Indians knew nothing of him. About four years after my first arrival on the Upper Missouri, I succeeded in getting a copy of his "Illustrations, etc., of the North American Indians," in two volumes. This was before the days, not only of railroads and express offices, but even of regular post-offices and post-roads in Northern Dakota, and the introduction of rare books was no easy matter. The work created the liveliest interest among the Indians. I lived then at Fort Stevenson (now an Indian school), some sixteen miles distant from the village where the remains of the three tribes, called by Catlin the Mandans, Riccarrees and Minnetarees, were living together. The news soon spread among these Indians that I had a book containing the "faces of their fathers," and ere many

days my quarters at Fort Stevenson were thronged with eager visitors. The portraits, although appearing in Catlin's plates only as light unshaded etchings, were generally readily recognized by the children and the grand-children of the departed heroes represented. The women rarely restrained their tears at the sight of these ancestral pictures. The men seemed to have less feeling and interest; but I soon had evidence that their indifference was affected.

Bancroft Library

Those who have read Catlin's works are aware that his most honored Indian hero was Four Bears, a chief of the Mandans. He devotes one full-page plate to Four Bears' portrait, another to his hospitality, four to his buffalo-robe, an entire chapter to his personality and history, and he often refers to him elsewhere in his various works. Among those who came to see my books was a son of this Four Bears, named Rushing Eagle, or (as he was more familiarly called by the whites) Bad Gun. Rushing Eagle was then second chief of the Mandans. He had already earned a high reputation for himself as a warrior and counselor. He was very gentle in his manner, reticent, dignified and disinclined to beg favors of white men. At the time of which I am speaking he was a middle-aged man; his father had been dead over thirty years and I did not suppose his recollection of his parent could be very vivid. At the first sight of the picture of Four Bears he showed no emotion, although he regarded it long and intently. While he was gazing at it I was called on business out of the room and I left him alone with the book, telling him, correctly as I supposed, that I would be gone some time, and asking him not to leave until I returned; but in a few moments I was obliged to come back for something I needed. When I re-entered the apartment I found him weeping and addressing an eloquent monologue to the picture of his departed father. Of course I intruded as short a time as possible on this scene and left him alone a long time so that he could "have his cry out."

In 1872, when an itinerant photographer made a tour of the Upper Missouri, going as far as the mouth of the Yellow-stone, I had a ferrotype of my friend Rushing Eagle made, the pose of the head approximating as closely as possible that of Catlin's picture of Four Bears. I have carried this ferrotype around with me ever since, and quite recently I have had it copied with admirable fidelity by the Moss Engraving Company, of New York. ("Mosstype.") I desire here to call attention to this picture in connection with Catlin's portrait of the elder chief, taken forty years earlier, and for this reason I introduce an enlarged copy of a portion of Catlin's etching of Four Bears, which latter is a full-length portrait. The old men of the tribe told me that Rushing Eagle was the image of his father. Such a great resemblance does not appear in the etching; there is a general likeness, but taking feature for feature there is much dis-

similarity. Remembering that Catlin's original pictures of the Indians were oil paintings, and that the etchings were but copies, I determined to examine the original which now hangs, with the rest of the Catlin collection, in the lecture-room of the National Museum, at Washington. Quite recently, (May, 1888,) at my request, Prof. Otis T. Mason kindly had it removed from its lofty perch on the south wall of the lecture-room, and together we compared it with the etching and with the picture of Rushing Eagle. It was evident that the etching was not a careful copy of the oil painting, and we agreed that the latter bore a greater resemblance to the picture of Rushing Eagle than the former. In the etching the line which marks the anterior border of the cheek curves backwards from the *ala* of the nose, while in the painting it extends in a straight line down to the angle of the mouth, as in the face of Rushing Eagle. The etching shows a mouth of classic curves, the oil painting represents a well formed but unconventional mouth like that seen in the accompanying Mosstype. The jaw in the painting, like that in the Mosstype, is heavier than in the etching. In both the painting and etching the eye seems set unnaturally far back.

In comparing the etching, or even the original painting, with the portrait of Rushing Eagle, we must remember that Catlin's pictures were necessarily hasty sketches, in which he sought rather to "catch a likeness" than to copy the face with painstaking exactness, and we must also bear in mind the great differences to be observed between portraits of our own historic men, painted by different artists, under different circumstances and at different periods of life. Often, in comparing such portraits, we recognize in them a common subject only by some prominent feature or by the accessories of dress.

In the accompanying engraving of Rushing Eagle some expression of sadness or melancholy may be detected, which is not to be seen in the portraits of his father, and closely as this engraving copies its original, the sad expression is still more pronounced in the ferrotype. Possibly the difference results from a failure on the part of the portrait painter to transfer the mournful glance to his canvas; but if it is inherent in the living models we need not wonder. Four Bears, when Catlin knew him, was a leader of a happy, well-fed and prosperous people, while his son, when he sat before the camera, was one of a starved and oppressed remnant, whose horoscope grew darker from day to day.

U.C. BERKELEY LIBRARIES
C003191116